



SENATOR

**Debbie Regala**

E-Newsletter - 27th District, Tacoma

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**February 8, 2010**

Dear Neighbors,

We are now in the fifth week of the legislative session. The current funding crisis has created an atmosphere in Olympia that feels like the work of a four month session is being crammed into this short sixty day session. Legislators, staff, stakeholders and beyond are working to find the best solution to the current budget shortfall. We are doing everything we can to prevent further erosion of protection to our basic values: quality schools, affordable healthcare, a safety net for the most vulnerable, affordable housing, public safety and a clean environment.

I wanted to tell you about the first big step we have taken toward this with the passage of two early action bills that address state workers compensation.

As these efforts continue, I look forward to updating you.

And as always please contact me with any ideas you may have to address our budget crisis.

Sincerely,

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### **Senate passes Early Action savings bills**

Working with the House, the Senate took a major early step to reduce the state's budget shortfall by approving four bills which will save \$116 million total straight out of the gate.

[Senate Bill 6503](#) requires state agencies — including the Legislature — to submit plans by May 15 to cut their payroll by another \$69 million through layoffs, furloughs, early retirements, reduced hours and the

like. Agencies that fail to submit a plan will be required to close one day a month for 13 months, sending workers home without pay.

The bill will affect roughly 40,000 general government employees, or about two-thirds of our general government workforce.

A number of employees are exempted in the bill, including employees at state institutions (prisons, hospitals and residential habilitation centers that operate around the clock). Other exemptions include employees charged with protecting health and safety, including the Military Department and State Patrol. Classroom instructors at state colleges and universities and teachers are not affected.

[Senate Bill 6382](#) would extend the already existing salary freeze for many state employees.

[House Bill 2998](#) would ban [salary bonuses](#) to state employees. [House Bill 2921](#) essentially reinstates the state government spending freeze that ended in July 2009. It would also ask state agencies to report to the Office of Financial Management (OFM) the following:

- (1) new and currently vacant staff positions filled;
- (2) out-of-state travel/training;
- (3) personal service contracts, and
- (4) equipment purchases over \$5,000.

Both of these efforts will save the state \$47 million.

The tough economy has made budget reductions necessary. Just as thousands of Washingtonians are doing more with less, it's important that our dedicated state workers share in the sacrifice. An option we could have pursued is eliminating jobs, but that would have only shifted the burden as out-of-work employees apply for unemployment benefits.

Of course, these early actions won't solve the entire budget problem, but they are prudent moves to reap savings as quickly as possible. They are just the first of many solutions to come in the weeks ahead. From here, we will continue to pursue a coordinated, multi-step process to bring the state's budget into balance.

### **Senate is leading the way in keeping salary costs down**

Combined, members of the Senate spent only 67 percent of their 2009 expense allotments and we will continue that trend in 2010 and beyond. We have eliminated out-of-state travel and cut back on hiring additional staff for legislative sessions. We've also laid people off. In fact, the Senate has nearly 20 percent fewer employees today than it did 20 years ago.

Reductions include:

- Reducing session staff to the lowest level in 30 years,
- continuing the freezes on hiring and wage increases,
- reducing or eliminating all discretionary spending,
- delaying equipment and software upgrades,
- continuing the ban on out-of-state travel and
- reducing paper through the use of technology.